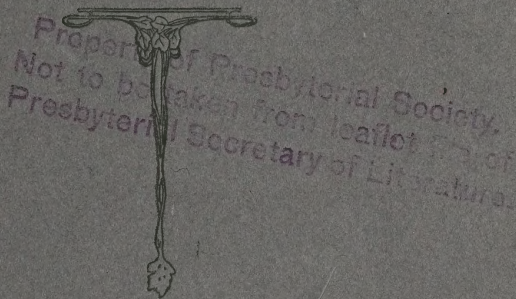


THE MESSAGE OF AN ALASKAN LIFE

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The Message of an Alaskan Life

“**T**HERE’S a little girl who says she can sing,” was the greeting of a rough miner to a group of companions gathered in the supply store at Fort Wrangel, as he placed in their midst a little dark-eyed Alaskan. And standing on an up-turned box, singing “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know,” little Fannie Willard all unconsciously made a beginning in her life work of telling the “old, old story.”

Whether the words of the hymn touched the hearts of the miners, recalling a past free from temptation and sin, is not known, but the little apron was most generously filled with nuts, dried fruits and whatever could be obtained from the store that was pleasing to the child, who ran off with her treasures, carrying them, not to the “Mission Home” where she was being trained and taught, but far down in the “Rancherie” to the Indian mother, who, perhaps seeing in this a means of gain, said the girl could be no longer left at the Mission but must stay with her.

The opening of a little “Mission Home” at Fort Wrangel, to rescue children, educate and Christianize them, was the beginning of Presbyterian Missions in Alaska, and there Mrs. McFarland, our pioneer missionary, had gathered a few children, among them little Shik-sha-ni of the H’lingit tribe—our Fannie Willard. For a long time after the “store treasures” had been carried to the mother she refused to let Fannie return to the “Home,” and it was not till the girl herself ran away to the Mission that Mrs. McFarland succeeded in again getting her as a permanent member of the little family. Even then, for days and days, the

mother hung around, even sleeping at night on the steps, determined to take the child with her, but finally Mrs. McFarland prevailed and Fannie was left unmolested at the Mission.

When a woman grown, Fannie, in speaking of this period of her life, said: "I never can quite understand how it could be that, young as I was, I *felt* there was peril at the Rancherie and safety at the Home, but I did, though at that time I could not have given expression to the thought."

Later years have shown clearly that it was the loving care of an all-wise Providence that not only caused the young girl to seek the sheltering roof of the Home but at the same time put it in the hearts of two Christian women at the East to provide the means for her support.

Just how this provision began and how the little Alaskan



Fannie Willard
1890

Fannie became Fannie Willard is best told in a recent letter from Miss Caroline Willard, of Auburn, New York: "The manner in which I became acquainted with and interested in her was most wonderful, and it seems as though the hand of the Lord was in it. My sister and myself had been talking of the work in Alaska and thinking we might do something for it. We wrote a letter to Mrs. McFarland, but as we did not know the address the letter was laid on the table until we could obtain it, and we went for a drive. As we were entering

the carriage a letter was handed to us by the postman, which proved to be from Mrs. McFarland in which she asked if we would not do something for the Alaskan girls. We replied in the affirma-

tive. She wrote a second letter telling us of a young Alaskan girl named Fannie, and asked if we would care for her and allow her to be called Fannie Willard. To this we replied that we would, and then followed the results with which you are acquainted."

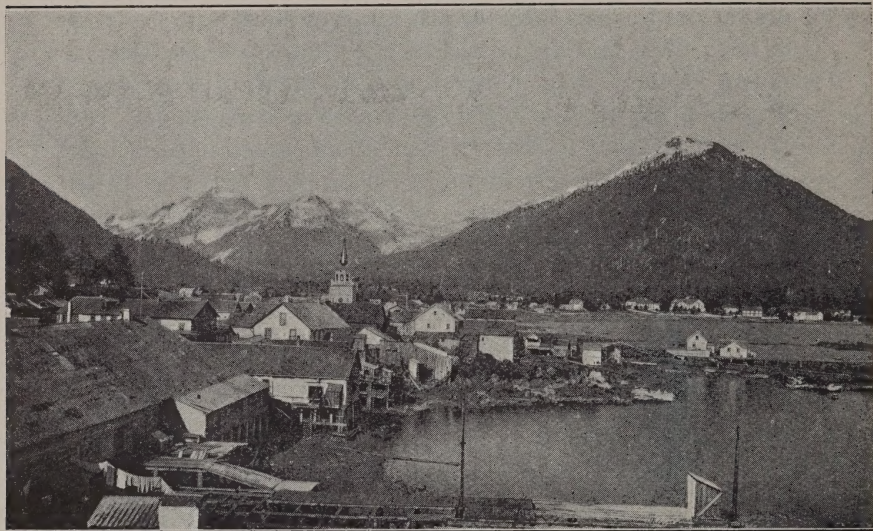
The earnest, conscientious, motherly training by Mrs. McFarland, first in the Home at Fort Wrangel and later at Sitka, to which place the work was transferred, admirably prepared Fannie for the further opportunities awaiting her.

In 1885 Mrs. McFarland visited the States, taking with her the young Alaskan, then in her fourteenth year, in order that if the way should open she might be placed in some school. For almost a year Mrs. McFarland went about addressing societies and awakening an interest in the Alaskan work, and also in her small charge, who sang her little hymns with a sweetness of voice that compelled attention.

In the fall of 1886 she was placed in a home and day school at Elizabeth, New Jersey, where she won the love and confidence of both teachers and schoolmates. Bright, apt, quick of perception, diligent in her studies, she ranked equally in her class with those of more favored homes and opportunities, and was a credit alike to her teachers, her school and to the friends who kindly made provision for her during her school life. In the school room she was a general favorite, in the home a loved and loving member of the family, her own testimony being that "neither by word nor look was I ever made to feel that I belonged to an alien people."

After four years of diligent study, years in which rapid progress was made and foundations laid for future study and service, she returned to her native Alaska and began her first work as assistant teacher in the Sitka Industrial School, to which position she had been commissioned by the Woman's Board of Home Missions.

That she was herself a native, and understood the obstacles to be overcome, gave her influence with her people and aided her greatly in the work as a classroom teacher as well as in the Sunday-school. For three years she gave excellent service in the Sitka School, then for a time the work was set aside, but was taken up again in a spirit of deep humility and with the con-



Sitka, Alaska—Mission buildings at the right, in the background

sciousness that the Master Himself had called her again to active service in His vineyard. A teacher and interpreter being needed at Chilkat, she was recommissioned, and entered upon her new work in the spring of 1894. The success which followed her efforts there may be seen in the following extracts from the letters of Mr. Warne, the missionary: "God has poured out rich blessings

upon us ever since Miss Willard came. I can see it and feel it every day; for our work she is beyond all price. . . . I know that you will be pleased to hear that a great revival has reached us, and that to all appearance a good work has resulted. It commenced about October, although there has been unabated interest, which has gradually increased ever since Miss Willard commenced interpreting a year and a half ago."

While at Chilkat the longing for greater opportunities for study was strong upon her. "I wish," she wrote to a friend, "I might go where I could study something. I am stagnating. I'm hungry for study. I'd like to study medicine. I have even taken up the study of French by myself, and find pleasure in it, but wouldn't you laugh to hear me pronounce! Most of all, though, I'd love to study medicine. It would help me, too, with 'my people.'"

This desire for further knowledge resulted in a year's study and training as nurse in the Fabiola Hospital, Oakland, Cal. She enjoyed both the study and the work, but on account of ill health was unable to complete the course; the knowledge gained, however, proved most helpful in her further work among her people and invaluable to herself during the years when it was all too evident that the insidious disease, tuberculosis, was making inroads on her system.

She returned to Alaska again, taking up mission work as assistant in the Sitka School and as scholarship correspondent. In addition to her regular duties she made a study of her own language—the H'lingit—reducing it to writing. Her excellent knowledge of English gave her a peculiar fitness for the work, and, together with Mr. Kelly, the Superintendent of the Sitka School, she wrote a grammar of the language, which was published by the Government in its last (1904) Educational Report.

This will undoubtedly prove to have a permanent language value, as well as being useful to our Alaskan missionaries, who wish a working knowledge of the H'lingit.

During the last two or three years of her connection with the Sitka School it was evident to her near friends that she was far from well, and though she performed her duties, it was with a great effort—how great will not be known, for she never complained.



Fannie Willard
1904

Friends of the work who had met her at Sitka became interested and counseled a change of air. Through their kindness provision was made for her to be placed under the care of a specialist at Saranac Lake, New York, and the winter of 1903-04 was passed in that place. Although from the first no encouragement was held out that the disease could be

conquered or even temporarily arrested, yet cheerfully and hopefully she set herself valiantly to work, following the physician's orders most implicitly, and during that long winter she made a brave fight for life.

Everything was done that medical skill and loving ministrations could accomplish, and at first it seemed as though there was improvement, but this was merely temporary, for it became evident that she was losing ground daily, and in the spring of 1904 she returned to Wrangel, Alaska.

It was a sore disappointment that she could do no more work, "not because I feel I am necessary," she said, "but I would love to do more for Him who has done so much for me."

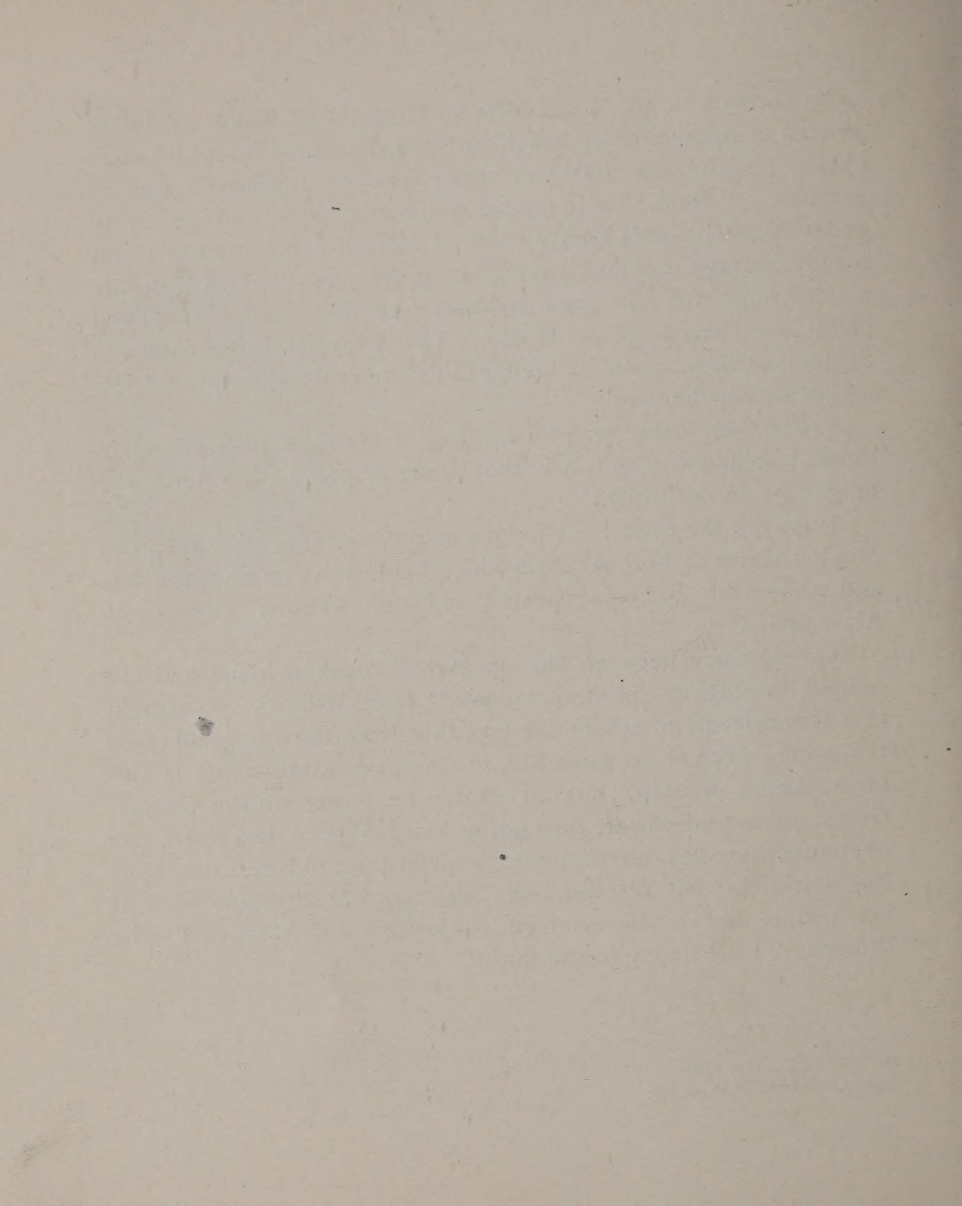
She remained at Wrangel only a few months, then asked

to be allowed to go to the Mission Hospital at Sitka. A letter written in August, after reaching Sitka, breathed forth the same cheery hopefulness that had characterized the winter's stay at Saranac. "Here I am in my beloved Sitka, happy and improving under Miss Gibson's kindly care. I did not come any too soon, for my courage was fast leaving me at Wrangel." This was only a false hope, for she grew weaker each day, until, like a tired child, she longed to go Home. The happy release came on September 29th, when in loving faith and trust she entered the higher service beyond.

"Tell her," she said, in sending a message to a friend in those last days, "tell her that I die happy in the faith she taught me so faithfully."

Happy in the faith! A joyous testimony, glorifying the little Mission Home at Fort Wrangel which held out its protecting arms, and answering the oft-repeated question whether missions in Alaska pay!

The distance between the unreached Alaskan home and the refined, intelligent Christian woman, Fannie Willard, is so great that it is difficult to accept the fact that from the one could come the other; yet not to exalt life, character or attainments is this little sketch written, but to exalt the power of the Gospel. God's grace and power, through a knowledge of His word, can overcome heredity, environment, superstition, old customs, spiritual darkness; *but He must have messengers to carry His word*, if her people are to be enabled to say, as did Alaskan Fannie Willard, "I die happy in the faith."



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